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TO: Department of State

OF EUR Enclosure: 755.11/7-2050

FROM: London, No. 368, July 20, 1950

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REF:

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SUBJECT: Return of the King to Belgium

INDEPENDENT OF STATE

EUR INDEX

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There is transmitted herewith as of possible interest to the Department copies of an editorial in The Times (independent conservative) of July 20, 1950 on the subject of the return of King Leopold to Belgium. scm

In addition to pointing out that the King would return "by the will of the Government party of the day against that of the Opposition" and that he would be "welcomed, it is true, by a majority of his subjects, but only by a minority of the Walloon section, and by a minority of the inhabitants of his capital, Brussels," The Times also went on to state that the King "is thought still to hold the view that the Sovereign is entitled to take political initiatives that may or may not coincide with the advice of his Ministers." The Times expressed misgivings as to the international as well as the national implications of this view. In this connection The Times wrote:

"King Leopold is regarded as still being attached to Belgium's policy of before the war of independent neutrality, and he is, constitutionally, Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Unfortunate consequences for Belgium's cooperation with the western Powers under the Brussels and Atlantic treaties might be foreseen. On the other hand, the essentials of foreign and military policy may appear otherwise to the King in Brussels, where he will be advised by responsible and experienced Ministers, than they may have appeared in the seclusion of Switzerland."

Frances E. Willis
Frances E. Willis
First Secretary of Embassy

Enclosure: *111*

The Times, July 20, 1950
(Five copies)

Copy to: American Embassy, Brussels

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ACTION COPY — DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The action office must return this permanent record copy to DC/R file.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/C/S/M

REVIEWED BY *J.L. SMITH*

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Belgian Parliament, sitting in joint session of the Senate and Chamber of Representatives, is debating a Government proposal to end the Regency. If carried, it will enable KING LEOPOLD to resume his reign immediately. The result of the vote, when it takes place, is not thought to be in doubt. The Christian Social Party, which is committed to the unconditional return of the KING, has modest majorities in both Houses over all other parties combined. What is doubtful is whether the decision to which Parliament is moving is the right way to end *la question royale* that has tormented the political life of Belgium for five years. The KING will not return by national agreement. He will return by the will of the Government party of the day against that of the Opposition. He will be welcomed, it is true, by a majority of his subjects, but only by a minority of the Walloon section, and by a minority of the inhabitants of his capital, Brussels. Time has not healed the estrangement between monarch and a large part of his people.

The great majority of all Belgians value the Throne. Yet many fear that the Throne itself may be jeopardized by the return of a monarch who has not the full consent and affection of the people. The KING, for his part, believes that the Throne will be more seriously compromised if he fails in his oath to fulfil the duties of his office when the majority of his people wish him to do so. He has recognized, however, that his position may be difficult. In a broadcast to the people in April he suggested that, once restored to his constitutional functions, he might almost at once devolve them on his eldest son, PRINCE BAUDOUIN, and resume them again only when he deemed it compatible with the interests of Belgium. The KING and the Government may be glad to fall back on the suggestion if his return should create a national emergency.

The full consequences of the KING's return may, however, be seen later rather than immediately. The royal question has opened up no divisions that were not already there, but it has hardened existing ones between Fleming and Walloon, clericals and anti-clericals, and between Conservatives and Liberals and Socialists. KING LEOPOLD, if he is to succeed in holding all sections together round the Throne, will have to dispel suspicions that attach to his interpretation of his constitutional power. He is thought still to hold the view that the Sovereign is entitled to take political initiatives that may or may not coincide with the advice of his Ministers. The implications of the view are international as well as national. KING LEOPOLD is regarded as still being attached to Belgium's policy of before the war of independent neutrality, and he is, constitutionally, Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Unfortunate consequences for Belgium's cooperation with the western Powers under the Brussels and Atlantic treaties might be foreseen. On the other hand, the essentials of foreign and military policy may appear otherwise to the KING in Brussels, where he will be advised by responsible and experienced Ministers, than they may have appeared in the seclusion of Switzerland.